

***Cryptantha spiculifera* (Piper) Payson**
Snake River cryptantha
Boraginaceae (Borage Family)

Status: State Sensitive
Rank: G4?S2?

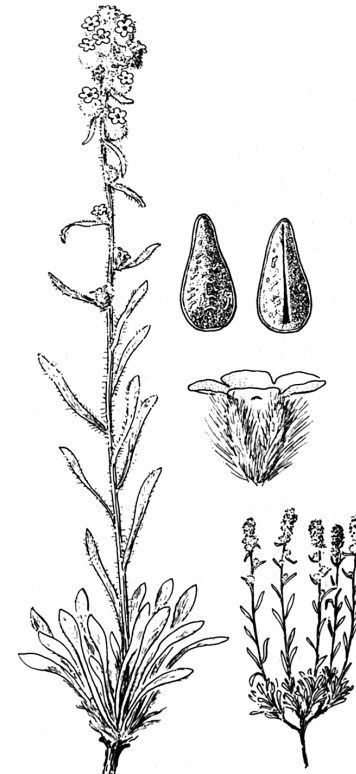
General Description: Adapted from Cronquist et al. (1984): Perennial from a taproot and usually a branching caudex, with several or rather numerous equal or subequal erect stems mostly 6 to 16 inches tall. Herbage gray-hairy and typically with an aspect of being rather shortly and sparsely to moderately spreading-bristly, but the pubescence sometimes more fully appressed. Leaves finely villous-strigose or loosely villous-puberulent on both sides, and with some longer, coarse bristles especially on the lower side, these appressed to more often loose and spreading, those on the lower side (and usually to some extent those on the upper side as well) evidently pustulate-based, the petioles often conspicuously setose-ciliate. Basal leaves densely tufted, narrowly to broadly oblanceolate, mostly $\frac{3}{4}$ to $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches long and $\frac{1}{16}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch wide. Cauline leaves well developed but not crowded, gradually reduced upwards. Inflorescence at first cylindric, but often opening up somewhat in age, usually coarsely spreading-bristly as well as more softly and shortly hairy. Flowers homostylis. Calyx segments mostly $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch long at anthesis, elongating to $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in fruit. Corolla white, with well developed, usually yellow fornicies (these $<\frac{1}{16}$ inch high, broadly rounded or slightly retuse at the summit), the tube about equaling or a little shorter than the calyx, crested at the base within, the flat, spreading limb $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ inch wide. 1 to 4 nutlets maturing, these lanceolate or lance-ovate, $\frac{1}{8}$ inch long, roughened on both sides, typically both rugose and tuberculate, seldom only one or the other, the scar elongate, closed or narrowly open, its margins not elevated. Style surpassing the nutlets by $\frac{1}{16}$ to $\frac{1}{8}$ inch.

Identification Tips: *Cryptantha spiculifera* can be confused with *C. celosioides*, another perennial *Cryptantha* that occurs within the same range. *C. spiculifera* differs from *C. celosioides* in its narrower leaves, a stronger tendency to a multiple caudex, somewhat different nutlets, and a more southerly range (Higgins 1971). The use of a technical key is recommended to distinguish between the two species.

Phenology: Recognizable between May and July.

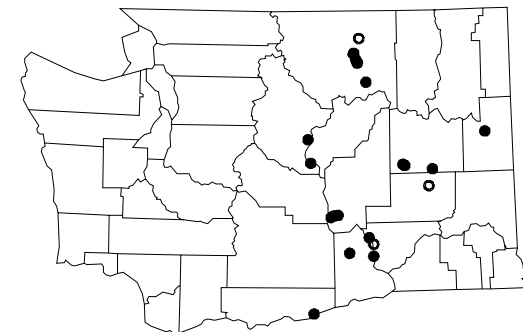
Range: Regional endemic, known from central Washington and eastern Oregon to northeastern California and northern Nevada, east through the Snake River Plains of Idaho, and western Montana. In Washington, the taxon has been found in the Okanogan Highlands, Eastern Cascades and Columbia Basin physiographic provinces.

Cryptantha spiculifera
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Known distribution of
Cryptantha spiculifera in
Washington



● Current (1980+)
○ Historic (older than 1980)

Cryptantha spiculifera

Snake River cryptantha



Photo by
Reid Schuller - WNHP

Cryptantha spiculifera

Snake River cryptantha

Habitat: The taxon occurs on dry, open, flat or sloping areas in stable or stony soils. Occurs where overall cover of vegetation is relatively low. Other species include *Artemisia rigida*, *Artemisia tridentata*, *Chrysothamnus nauseosus*, *Eriogonum sphaerocephalum*, *Salvia dorrii*, *Lupinus sericeus*, *Agropyron spicatum*, and *Poa secunda*.

Ecology: Based on the species' choice of habitats, it probably does not tolerate direct competition with other herbs or is not able to endure the shade of shrubs or trees. Its ability to grow and reproduce in a relatively harsh environment enables the taxon to colonize areas where others species may not survive (Higgins 1971).

State Status Comments: There are a limited number of records for this species in Washington. In addition, it is possible that some of the records for *Cryptantha spiculifera* are actually *C. celosioides*.

Inventory Needs: All known sites should be revisited to confirm identification. Additional inventory is needed throughout eastern Washington.

Threats and Management Concerns: Agricultural conversion, grazing, ORV use, and irrigation related groundwater changes are all threats to the species.

Comments: Identified in Hitchcock et al. (1959) as a synonym for *Cryptantha interrupta* (Greene) Pays. However, the taxa are now treated as distinct, with *Cryptantha spiculifera* occurring in Washington, but not *Cryptantha interrupta*.

References:

Cronquist, A. et al. 1984. *Intermountain Flora: Vascular Plants of the Intermountain West, U.S.A. Volume Four*. The New York Botanical Garden, New York. 573 pp.

Higgins, L.C. 1971. A revision of *Cryptantha* subgenus *Oreocarya*. Brigham Young University Science Bulletin. Volume XIII (4): 1-63.
Hitchcock, C. L., A. Cronquist, M. Ownbey, and J.W. Thompson. 1959. *Vascular Plants of the Pacific Northwest, Part 4: Ericaceae Through Campanulaceae*. University of Washington Press, Seattle. 510 pp.



Photo by Reid Schuller - WNHP